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**COLUMBUS CARES: A Benefit Dance Performance**  
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Having performed with The Ohio State University's Department of Dance for the past three years, the question would always arise before a performance, "How are we going to draw an audience?" The obvious answers included distributing posters and postcards and having the dancers personally invite their friends. However, with these advertisements being the same as every other performing group in the city, it became obvious that The Ohio State University Department of Dance needed find a way to stand out in the Columbus community.

## **GETTING STARTED**

During the winter and spring quarters of 2007, I had the opportunity to intern with Robin Anderson as she continued to develop her *:03 Minute Portions* event sampler she implemented as a graduate student in the Department of Dance. This event enabled attendees of the Short North's Gallery Hop to walk in and out of "Emack and Bolio's" ice cream shop and view dance in an informal setting with hopes of drawing them into OSU's *Dance Downtown* performance. With Robin leaving the department, I was inspired to look deeper into audience development for dance performances. After deciding to research the topic in New York City during my summer as an intern for "Broadway Dance Center", I received an Undergraduate Research Scholarship from the College of the Arts and a Quarterly Funding Initiative from the Department of Dance.

The second week I was in New York, I came across a performance benefiting "Dancers Responding to AIDS" (DRA) in the middle of Times Square called *Solstice: Dancing at the Crossroads* and was impressed with the unparalleled opportunity for building an audience. There

were over 30 dance companies performing in this free show who had the chance to network with other dancers involved, expose their unique dance forms to millions of people walking by and at the same time, use their talents to raise money for DRA. Immediately following the show, I found Denise Roberts Hurlin, founding director of Dancers Responding to AIDS and scheduled a meeting to talk more about what the organization did.

After meeting with Frank Conway at DRA I learned that “Dancers Responding to AIDS” was a program of “Broadway Cares/ Equity Fights AIDS”. As the nations leading industry-based, nonprofit AIDS fundraising and grants making organization, they have raised over \$140 million dollars to provide critically needed services for people with AIDS and other serious illnesses. Specifically, “Dancers Responding to AIDS” has two large events a year that bring money into the organization. Additionally major dance companies make audience appeals at the ends of their shows. The initiatives made by “Dancers Responding to AIDS”, to use dancing for a cause, moved me to look deeper into how philanthropic strategies could be viewed as an admirable way to support the community while dancers share their art.

## **THE PLANNING OF COLUMBUS CARES**

Immediately upon returning to school, Susan Van Pelt Petry and myself began meeting on a weekly basis to talk about how research during the summer informed me of new ideas for developing audiences. Holding onto the idea of dancing for a cause, it became a goal to have The OSU Department of Dance perform at DRA’s *Solstice: Dancing at the Crossroads*. I made a call to Denise Roberts Hurlin and began talking about this goal and together we discussed means by which to make this happen. She suggested that some dancers raise money through audience appeals and others take part in events that are benefiting DRA. With no dance companies around that were actively involved with benefiting DRA, I decided to work towards a collaboration with

The Ohio State University Department of Dance and “Dancers Responding to AIDS” to plan “Columbus Cares” in an effort to draw the Columbus Community together for an evening of dance. The proceeds would be designated to solely benefit DRA.

## **THE OBJECTIVES**

Since contemporary dance performances tend to attract a small audience, my goal was to use a philanthropic audience development strategy in order to assemble a large audience for the featured event and build audiences for future performances. By incorporating an array of dance forms, audience members would be exposed to the variety that Columbus has to offer and continue to support participating dance companies and organizations in the future. My goal for fundraising was to raise \$25,000. My method of fundraising would include seeking corporate sponsorships and active participation in fundraising from the performers.

## **METHODS**

### *REACHING OUT TO PERFORMERS*

Knowing that I wanted “Columbus Cares” to host a unique variety of dance forms, I began calling over 40 dance organizations across Ohio including dance departments, dance companies, and dance studios. I asked groups to perform based on my own knowledge of the Ohio dance scene and by using the *Google* search engine online. During the initial calls, I asked groups if they would be interested in participating in a benefit dance performance, what time of the year would work with their schedule and if they would be willing to sell tickets in order to participate. These phone calls began in October 2007 and lasted through April 2008. In the beginning, I had a strong interest from five dance studios, two student organizations and two guest artists. This interest was enough to begin contacting The Vern Riffe Center’s Capitol Theatre about setting a date for the show.

### *SETTING A DATE*

Capitol Theatre was the perfect venue for “Columbus Cares”. There was ample space backstage to hold 200 dancers and many artists consider it an honor to perform in the theatre. Capitol Theatre became one of the many perks for performing in the show. Setting the date took about two months. Initially, there were two dates available to choose from: Friday, April 17 or Saturday, May 10, 2008. The decision was made based on Denise’s experience from other events she has hosted in the past. If we had gone with the Friday performance, younger dancers would have had to get out of school for the tech rehearsal the day of the show. With Saturday, May 10, 2008 being a good match with the interested performers’ schedules, we decided to work towards confirming this plan. There was a tentative hold on May 10, and as soon as we felt comfortable with the dancers interest level, we began moving forward with a contract in mid December and the date and space was confirmed by the end of January for Capitol Theatre.

### *MARKETING*

With a date set and performers committing to “Columbus Cares”, marketing was initiated in February. The first step with marketing was to design a website that interested sponsors, participants and audience members could be linked to from posters, postcards and email blasts. I used “iWeb” on my computer to design, publish and maintain the event website. From February on, I updated the website to include the following pages:

- HOME- summary of the date, time, location of event, linking browsers to DRA and OSU Dance’s websites.
- ABOUT- a listing of all performance groups’ names with links to their websites, information about how “Columbus Cares” was started, what DRA is and contact information.

- TICKETS- information on ticket prices, locations of where tickets could be purchased and contact information.
- INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS- I designed a blog to keep performers informed about what and when information was due. The page was designed to enable dancers to comment and keep in touch about what needed to be done, however, I found that no one responded.
- PRESS RELEASE- a “Columbus Cares” press release was posted for dancers to print off and give to their local newspapers and for interested media to use as a resource.
- PHOTOS- dancers sent photos of themselves rehearsing or performing the dances that were going to be performed on May 10. Following the show, pictures were posted of the actual Columbus Cares performance.
- MEDIA COVERAGE- Included links to all the news articles written about “Columbus Cares”.
- GET INVOLVED- contact information provided for interested sponsors or performers to learn more about becoming a part of Columbus Cares.
- 2008 RESULTS- following the show, I put an email up from Denise Roberts Hurlin about the event’s success for the dancers to read.
- VIDEO TRAILER- a 3-minute trailer including performers from the event was posted after the show. This will be used for promoting future events.

Once the website was designed, Chris Giarmo, graphic designer for DRA, designed the event logo and image. Dancers Responding to AIDS has talented employees working with them who offered tremendous help in designing the promotional materials for the event. The logo was designed by February 27, 2008. I placed the logo on some business cards that had the event

website listed and my contact information in order to distribute until postcards were available.

The poster and postcards were designed by DRA and printed by April 18<sup>th</sup>. Originally I had wanted the posters and postcards printed by April 3<sup>rd</sup>. However, I had not received responses from the letters I sent to sponsors and waited until April 13<sup>th</sup> to confirm the copy of the posters. Once I had the promotional materials in hand, I distributed them to the 15 participating dance groups and friends who were passionate about the cause. There were 100 posters printed and 5,000 postcards. The main areas I targeted in distribution of promotional materials included setting up a booth at the Easton Town Center, posting information in the Short North and suburbs of the dance organizations along with going to dance history classes in the Department of Dance. Another significant way money was raised and the event was promoted at the same time was through the audience appeals at the end of OSU's *Dance Downtown* and *The Greek Variety Show*. At the beginning of *Dance Downtown*, Susan Petry mentioned that "Columbus Cares" was going to be performed at the same theatre the very next week. This information was also written on the back of *Dance Downtown*'s program. Susan mentioned that there would be tin buckets for audience members to make donations to DRA at intermission and at the end of the show. Through the audience appeal at *Dance Downtown* we managed to raise \$385.00 for DRA.

With help from Victoria Ellwood, OSU College of the Arts public relations specialist, after our meeting on February 25<sup>th</sup>, I wrote a press release that was then distributed to every searchable dance or news related website, blog, newspaper or TV station starting on April 8<sup>th</sup> until the week of the show. Information for Columbus Cares could be found in articles written in *Columbus Alive*, *The Lantern*, *The Ohio State University College of the Arts* event page, *Columbus Local News*, *Mansfield News Journal*, *Facebook*, *OSU Dance Blogspot*, *OSU*

*Department of Dance, Columbus Arts, CAPA's event page, Dance Plus Ballroom's monthly newsletter, Columbus Dance Stuff Blog, The Columbus Dispatch, You Tube, and Ohio Dance.*

The best form of marketing was through word of mouth. Since there were 151 dancers committed to the May 10 performance, whenever friends were asking dancers what they were doing on Saturday night, "Columbus Cares" was instantly promoted. I distributed postcards to all the students to hand out to family and friends.

### *SPONSORSHIP*

Meanwhile, I wrote a sponsorship package that offered corporate sponsors the opportunity to support "Columbus Cares". This task was the most difficult of all. In March, I sent over 20 letters and did not obtain one sponsor. The reasons I believe my attempts failed were that this was a one-time event, I did not know any of the business owners personally, nor did I have time to schedule meetings to personally present my project. As far as they knew, "Columbus Cares" may or may not be a success. In the future, I would designate one person to be in charge of organizing sponsorship so they could have the time to plan meetings and clearly communicate the advantages of being involved in a benefit dance performance. With the successful history of the premier event and making use of a "Columbus Cares" video trailer I designed, gaining sponsorship in the future will be a much easier task.

### *PLANNING THE PRODUCTION*

"Columbus Cares" used the same production template as other student based DRA benefit performances. However, unlike other student driven events produced on behalf of DRA, this event embodied the Columbus community of dance by including professionals, college dance groups and local dance studios. OSU student organizations and local dance studios were expected to sell tickets for the show based on how many minutes they would be performing. If

they were doing a three-minute dance they had to sell 30 tickets, for six minutes, 60 tickets and for 9 minutes, 80 tickets. With this understanding, tickets were printed on April 15<sup>th</sup>. I put together eight packets of information including a tentative itinerary for the day, information on how to contact the lighting designer, Dave Covey, information about “Dancers Responding to AIDS”, the tickets they were expected to sell, a ticket log to record their sales, a contract they signed committing to sell the tickets or providing the monetary equivalent, and credit card and cash slips for taking orders. Upon distributing these packets on April 17<sup>th</sup>, I was confident moving forward with the knowledge that an audience base of 385 or \$9,625 was already assured.

I had emailed requests for information from the dancers on April 4<sup>th</sup> and required that dancers return information sheets about their dances along with biographies by April 18<sup>th</sup> in order to assemble the program. Once this information was collected, I began to arrange and confirm the tech run order for the day of the show as well as the program order. I had the program designed and printed on May 7. In the future, the program should be started two weeks prior to the show and completed a week prior to the event date. The week of the show should be free to deal with last minute details. I used the department card to purchase the programs at Kinko’s. This gave me a university discount and saved me over \$500. I had 900 programs printed for \$315.00. Realistically I should have only printed 700. The printing of programs was the only cost I personally had to front. Dave Covey donated his time as the lighting designer and production manager. On April 23<sup>rd</sup> (two and a half weeks before the show) Dave and I sent an email to the dancers with four cues they could choose from for their piece. It was up to the dancers to contact Dave in order for the tech rehearsal to run smoothly. The tech run was from 10:15- 12:00 and 1:00-5:00 the day of the performance. Each group of dancers received 15 minutes to run their dance. We did not run in program order because the participating dance



studios needed to go last since they were expected to remain in the theatre upon their arrival.

For the weekend of the event, I typed out an itinerary of everything that needed to be done: volunteers' schedules, contact information, tech order, show order, cue sheets, and dressing room assignments. I put the information together in easy to view folders and handed them to my helpers in charge of different tasks.

### *VOLUNTEERS*

The day of "Columbus Cares" I had twelve student volunteers, two OSU faculty volunteers, and a professional photographer volunteer their time to help with the production and documentation of the show. There were four union workers in charge of lights, sound and the stage. Dave Covey donated his time as the production manager and lighting designer and my student volunteers included: Yolanda Royster-Stage Manager, Chris Havner-Assistant Stage Manager/runner, Robyn Young, Yen-Fang Yu, Adriana Durant, Daniela Wancier and Katie Lin as greeters, and Ashleigh Grund, Sarah Min and Sonam Rama assisted in managing the box office. During the day, student videographers Elizabeth Goodrich and Rachael Leyva-Riggs captured the rehearsal process. Maggie Thompson offered her service as a photographer during rehearsal and the show. Rachael returned in the evening along with Shawn Hove to film "Columbus Cares". Without the help of these volunteers, the show would have not happened as smoothly as it did. The amount of volunteers I had for the show was perfect. The only thing I would change in the future would be to have two of the volunteers stay 20 minutes after to help with the clean up.

### *THE SHOW*

"Columbus Cares" started at 7pm on Saturday, May 10, 2008 and hosted a variety of talent from the Columbus community. With fifteen groups involved, including six guest artists, four

OSU Student organizations, and five dance studios, the show displayed an array of dancers from amateur to professional. Denise Roberts Hurlin, founding director of DRA, flew in on Friday to help with last minute details and stayed through Sunday in order to assist in the production of the show. She was impressed throughout the entire day with the diversity in the program and is anticipating the opportunity to make this an annual event. The best part of the evening was transitioning from Trisha Brown's *Sololos* into Delta Gamma's Dance Team. The juxtaposition of the evening was dramatic in everyway and created the opportunity for audience members who are only exposed to their child's dance studio's engage in thinking "outside the box", viewing forms of dance they may not have known existed that are located nearby for them to support in the future. While Trisha Brown's work is usually harder to watch and understand due to its puzzle like nature, I heard countless praises about the performance of *Sololos* after the show concluded. "Columbus Cares" set up an interesting context to sample dance forms both familiar and unfamiliar. It was refreshing to watch *Sololos* because of how different it was from the other dances that were performed.

## **ANALYSIS**

With 151 Dancers involved in "Columbus Cares" it became uniquely marketable. Dancers felt a deep connection to the show because of their own fundraising through ticket sales. Instead of the performance being solely about showcasing their talent, it provided a purpose of helping the community that supports their dancing. The dancers who sold tickets seemed to be more connected to the show. In the future, I would like to incorporate more than just eight groups selling tickets. This will draw an even larger audience and get dancers involved in the process on a deeper level. If dancers are guest artists and therefore not required to sell tickets, it

should be a requirement that they have “Columbus Cares” listed on their upcoming performances or that they send an email blast to their mailing list to help with promotion of the event.

Throughout the planning process, I continued to find places of opportunity in the University that audience appeals could be done for DRA. The Department of Dance could do audience appeals during grad concerts, elective informances, winter concert or faculty concerts and other dance groups could do one or two audience appeals around the year at their performances. These appeals could help with raising money to participate in “Columbus Cares”.

Audience members left knowing their money did not just stop at the end of the show but that it would actually go to helping someone in need. Throughout the evening they were entertained by 22 different dance groups which included TAP, JAZZ, BALLET, MODERN, HIP HOP, CHINESE DANCE, BALLROOM and STEPPING. The entire show lasted two hours and flowed according to the schedule because of fantastic volunteers and prepared dancers.

## **CONCLUSION**

**\$11,531.97** was raised for Dancers Responding to AIDS at the “Columbus Cares” event. My original goal was \$25,000 but because I was unable to receive any corporate sponsorship and I did not include more dance studios and organizations that were required to sell tickets, this goal was not reached. The total cost for the Capitol Theatre was \$4,970 and additional costs included the printing of programs for \$315.00 and the printing of posters and postcards for \$400. This totaled \$5,685 in spending, making our total profit \$5,846.97.

There were 440 people in attendance on May 10, 2008 at The Vern Riffe Capitol Theatre. Tickets were priced at \$25 for a general admission seat. I would be interested in creating a student rate for \$15 because we had space to accommodate and this may be a more feasible rate for college students and increase ticket sales. The argument for keeping the rate at \$25 a ticket is

that people typically spend the money to support a cause and their friends who are performing. Generally it is thought that if they want to go, they will spend the money. The better way to sell additional tickets, rather than lowering the price, would be to require more of the groups to sell tickets in order to participate. Another option may be to contact the student union and ask them to cover half the price of the tickets through the student activity fee in order to make a better deal for college students. This show set up an excellent model for similar events in the future and I believe that audience members are likely to come next year and bring friends to share in this entertaining evening.

Using philanthropic strategies for audience development creates a deeper reason to go watch dance or participate in a performance. Prospective audience members have a more significant reason to attend a dance performance. This event helps to answer how dance can fit into society. Dancers involved in the performance were able to leave knowing they can be an agent for social change and felt honored to take part in and promote “Columbus Cares”. By including a large number of performers, the dancers, audience, and recipients of the grants distributed by Dancers Responding to AIDS all benefited from the “Columbus Cares” performance. Dancers of all different styles and abilities were able to unite for one performance and have the chance to see work in the community that they may not have taken the time to attend. Audience members were exposed to 15 entertaining groups in one evening. AIDS service organizations that receive grants from DRA will benefit from the money raised through this evening of dance.

## **DENMAN**

On May 14, 2008, I had the opportunity to present this process at the Denman Undergraduate Research Forum. The judges and students were impressed with the show and

wanted to know when they could get tickets for the next time “Columbus Cares” comes around. It was a tremendous experience to share this inspiring project with people in the OSU community since we had so much support and participation from OSU students. The judges were thrilled that OSU had dancers committed to using their talents to help fight AIDS.

I received first place in the Arts/Architecture section of the Denman and was honored that the judges agreed that this project was a success and has great potential for the future.

## **IN THE FUTURE**

If “Columbus Cares” were to be produced again, I would recommend organizing a committee that meets at least once a week. It would be interesting to set up an internship opportunity with Dancers Responding to AIDS for students interested in audience development and arts administration. Ideally, there would be a four-member team including one prominent member of the business community and three students. The business mind of the group (possibly a faculty member in Fisher) would work on gaining corporate sponsorships through meetings with his or her contacts. Another opportunity would be coordinating an auction prior to the show or collecting materials that could be auctioned off at intermission. One student would head up production by communicating with the dancers involved and the production stage manager to ensure a smooth run the day of the show and make sure all the details with the theatre were confirmed. Another student would be in charge of marketing the event by finding places to post promotional materials, writing the press release, communicating with the media, thinking of new ways to draw an audience, and designing and updating a website for the event. The final student would be in charge of putting together materials to hand out to dance students. This position would hold more administrative responsibilities. They would book performers, help them understand their commitment to the show, answer questions, deliver tickets and promotional

materials to the students, help production with setting a schedule for the weekend of the show, log the process, keep weekly contact with DRA and run the committee meetings.

I have been talking with Denise Roberts Hurlin about working together to create a new position in their office for me to be their “College Ambassador” ~~to~~ and produce similar events around the country at various dance departments. She is thrilled about the potential this has for growth and we will be discussing this job opportunity during the summer. It is my goal that next year, three events similar to “Columbus Cares” will be produced in collaboration with dance departments around the country. Ideally, in three years, the number of events would expand to ten and continue to grow.

In determining success for “Columbus Cares”, I am evaluating four things: exposing audience members to new dance companies, raising more money than we spent on production, connecting the dance community in Columbus, and learning how to produce an event. This event was successful in developing audience members for dance. In retrospect, I wish I had considered surveying the audience requesting them to star the groups that they had seen perform in the past and groups that they are interested in supporting after the performance. My projection would be that potentially every member of the audience was exposed to at least four new dance groups, if not more. Even if an audience member was exposed to only one, new dance company, the show was successful in creating an atmosphere for artists to gain new exposure in their community. Although I did not raise my goal of \$25,000, the \$11,531.97 that was raised is going to be put to great use and I am proud to have been a part of helping others. The skills I learned through this event are gained through mentorship and experience. I learned how to communicate with people and articulate what I need from them, manage my time, stay organized, multi-task, delegate tasks, work with a large amount of dancers and a production team, design and maintain a

website, market a dance performance, design a video trailer, and edit an evening length performance on Final Cut Pro. Based on my criteria for success, I believe “Columbus Cares” lived up to its’ expectations in every way. It was the first time I have ever tried something like this and I am proud of where ‘thinking big and bold’ has taken me. The opportunity to produce this program based on prior research has been the highlight of my education at The Ohio State.